

## NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL

### **The defence of the profession** ***Contracts are ennobling too***

Recent announcements for archivists' posts that have appeared in the second half of this year have been for category A graduate technicians, which suggests the gradual standardisation of the professional status of archivists. It is nevertheless true that there are quite irregular contractual circumstances that run the risk of becoming firmly embedded while professional instability and provisionality is also very widespread. However, at least it seems that different authorities have the best intentions to dignify and regularise the professional status of archivists.

It is we the archivists who are responsible for the regularisation of the profession. We have been able to produce and develop better tools and more efficient instruments to do our work and complement our responsibilities. The main tools are; Law 10/2001, on Archives and Documents, which updated and modernised the contents of the previous Law 6/1985 that had very much been left behind by developments in modern archival management; the Professional Code of Ethics of Catalan Archivists, approved at the 2002 general assembly that established the profession's ethical principles and recommendations to be followed; and the Graduate School of Archival and Records Management, which is one step further towards gaining archival qualifications and university acknowledgement thereof. These tools have enabled a highly specific definition of the profile of the archive professional, both for society and for the institutions where we work.

A significant obstacle on the path towards standardisation of the profession has arisen in the recent ruling of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia, number 704/2005 on the administrative appeal presented against the result of the civil service examinations for posts to join the body of graduate archivists of the Government of Catalonia in 2000. This ruling asserted that the services rendered in performing an archivist's functions in accordance with any contract and professional category type may be rightly counted as effective work in merit-based selection.

The Association of Archivists of Catalonia, whose main function is to defend archivists, considers compliance with article 22 of Law 10/2001 on Archives and Documents to be a priority, and that at all events a qualified expert with a contract that befits the qualifications and training required should be in charge of an archive.

As stated in the preamble of our professional code of ethics, graduate qualification is required because archivists have the social function of ensuring and enabling the use of archive documents and of the information they contain, for legal, administrative, informative, cultural and scientific purposes. Archivists thus contribute to improving organisations' capacity to operate, to safeguarding the rights and duties of the individuals featured in the documents, to preserving collective memory and to making scientific research and cultural dissemination possible.

A feeling of impotence therefore arose as a result of a ruling that affects professional archivists in several ways. First, the ruling underrates the figure of the archivist and erodes the good image we have earned through our tenacity over the years. It likewise spoils the concept of a modern and transparent administration that we all seek and of which we form an active part.

Second, the ruling of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia validates and provides legal coverage for some of the Administration's irregular practices such as contracting staff to perform the work of archivists (Law 10/2001 rules that they must be qualified graduates) with unstable mid-level technician or administrative worker contracts. In short, it is counterproductive and undermines the Administration's capacity to operate.

Third, this type of irregular conduct by the Administration, which is even manifest in point 4 of the ruling, discourages people who work honestly and professionally and who seek acknowledgement of their work at its proper value, and prompts them not to demand a decent contract.

Fourth, we can hardly be respected in the private sector, if in the public Administration, where we have a longer tradition as a profession, our work and our contribution to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the Administration is not acknowledged with fair contracts in line with that established in article 22 of Law 10/2001, on Archives and Documents, and in article 12 of Decree 76/1996, on the organisation of the archives of the Government of Catalonia.

Logically, the Association of Archivists of Catalonia will use all the legal channels available to it to defend the professional dignity of archivists. In this case it has therefore already expressed its unease and concern to the Directorate General for the Civil Service of the Ministry of Governance and Public Administration and the Sub-Directorate General for Archives of the Ministry of Culture. It is now the responsibility of these bodies to ensure compliance with the law and to exercise the utmost care in the selection processes of the corps of specialist archivists, particularly when establishing the rules for announcing open competitions for civil service posts and supervising the announcements of other authorities.

Hence, it is good to hear that the Sub-Directorate General for Archives has taken the initiative of producing a framework document of specific rules for the selection of staff of the special Administrative scale, archivist or contracted employee, archivists for small municipalities. The Sub-Directorate General for Archives is reaching agreement thereupon with our Association in order to provide a homogeneous, sound image in this process to ennoble the profession.

As the association that defends professional archivists, the Association of Archivists of Catalonia will continue to supervise all offers of public employment that appear, in order to prevent legal anomalies or subterfuges that may arise. We may thereupon immediately contact those making the announcements to correct possible irregularities or defects of form.

Currently, it is important to continue demanding strict compliance with the law so that such situations do not occur again. The notion that *work is ennobling* is an idea with which everyone is familiar. As professional archivists we would also like the idea that *contracts are ennobling* to be true.